

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 SAM-01 SAJ-01 OMB-01

EB-11 DRC-01 FEA-02 SCI-06 TRSE-00 /127 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7249

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PARIS 5364/1

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: NEW FRENCH GOVERNMENT--ASSESSMENT

REF: PARIS 5259

1. SUMMARY: REAPPOINTMENT OF MESSMER AT THE HEAD
OF SMALLER, LEANER, MORE COHESIVE GOVERNMENT HELPS
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PRESIDENT POMPIDOU SIMULTANEOUSLY TO ACCOMPLISH

SEVERAL POLITICAL ENDS. HE HAS CLEARLY AND STRONGLY REAFFIRMED HIS CONFIDENCE IN MESSMER, WHOSE RE-APPOINTMENT HAS LAID TO REST, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, SPECULATION OVER A SUCCESSOR TO POMPIDOU AND OVER POSSIBLE EARLY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. HE HAS RECAPTURED HIS CONTROL OVER THE TIMING OF POLITICAL INITIATIVES. HE HAS RID THE GOVERNMENT OF SEVERAL MINISTERS WHO HAD PERFORMED POORLY AND HAD CAUSED TROUBLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT. HE WILL SEEK TO PRESENT THE NEW GOVERNMENT AS ONE BETTER ABLE TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEMS CURRENTLY FACING FRANCE THAN COULD ITS PREDECESSOR. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, NEVERTHELESS, WHETHER THE FRENCH WILL IN FACT ACCEPT THE GOVERNMENT AS NEW AND DIFFERENT SINCE EVERY MEMBER OF IT WAS IN THE LAST GOVERNMENT, MOST OF THEM REMAINING IN THEIR OLD POSTS, AND IT CONTINUES TO BE HEADED BY THE LACKLUSTER MESSMER. NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES EXPECTED IN FRENCH FOREIGN OR DEFENSE POLICIES.

END SUMMARY

2. THE PRINCIPAL SURPRISE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT ITSELF IS HOW LITTLE IT HAS CHANGED. MESSMER, OF COURSE, REMAINS AS PRIME MINISTER. THREE MINISTERS, GUICHARD, OF TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT, TAITTINGER OF JUSTICE AND GISCARD OF FINANCE, REMAIN AT THEIR POSTS BUT RECEIVE THE PRESTIGIOUS TITLE OF MINISTER OF STATE. THEIR INFLUENCE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT PRESUMABLY INCREASES. THE INCUMBENTS IN MOST OTHER IMPORTANT MINISTRIES ALSO STAY ON. IN SWAPPING CHIRAC AND MARCELLIN, WHO NOW GO TO INTERIOR AND AGRICULTURE RESPECTIVELY, POMPIDOU HOPES TO LESSEN THE EFFECT OF THE BAD PRESS AND CRITICISM OF SOME POLICE SERVICES AND OF MARCELLIN PERSONALLY, MOST RECENTLY BECAUSE OF THE CANARD ENCHAINE BUGGING AFFAIR. POMPIDOU ALSO PRESUMABLY WISHED TO STOP THE CREATION OF POLITICAL FIEFDOMS BY CHIRAC AND ROYER, AMONG FRENCH FARMERS AND SMALLSHOPKEEPERS RESPECTIVELY. THEIR TRANSFERRAL FROM AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE TAKES THEM AWAY FROM THEIR SPECIAL

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CONSTITUENCIES.

3. THE NUMBER OF MINISTERS IS REDUCED FROM TWENTY-TWO TO FIFTEEN AND THAT OF STATE SECRETARIES FROM FIFTEEN TO THIRTEEN. THIS SHOULD SERVE TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENTAL COHESION AND COORDINATION ESPECIALLY SINCE ONLY THE MINISTERS WILL NOW PARTICIPATE IN CABINET MEETINGS. ADDITIONALLY,

POMPIDOU MUST BE PLEASED AT DROPPING DRUON, STASI, CHARBONNEL, POUJADE, AND MALAUD, ALL OF WHOM HAVE EMBARRASSED THE PRESIDENT OR PRIME MINISTER BY MAKING INTEMPERATE STATEMENTS, SOME OF THEM DIRECTLY COUNTER TO GOVERNMENT POLICY. THE SMALLER CABINET GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A "WAR CABINET", OF A LEAN, TOUGH ADMINISTRATION TO ENABLE FRANCE BETTER TO SOLVE CURRENT PROBLEMS SUCH AS ENERGY AND INFLATION. POMPIDOU PLEDGED HIS ACTIVE LEADERSHIP TO SOLVE SUCH PROBLEMS IN THIS YEAR-END ADDRESS TO THE NATION. THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS DESIGNED TO SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS DETERMINATION.

4. PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT PURPOSE BEHIND THIS MINISTERIAL SHAKEUP WAS POMPIDOU'S DESIRE TO REAFFIRM, THE CLEAREST AND MOST UNAMBIGUOUS WAY POSSIBLE, HIS CONFIDENCE IN MESSMER. IN REAPPOINTING MESSMER, POMPIDOU HAS PROBABLY HALTED, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, THE SPATE OF RUMORS REGARDING THIS SUCCESSION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. HAD HE APPOINTED AS PRIME MINISTER ANY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS, E.G., GISCARD D'ESTAING OR CHABAN-DELMAS, IT WOULD IMMEDIATELY HAVE BEEN CONSTRUED AS INVOLVING THE NOMINATION OF POMPIDOU'S DAUPHIN. MESSMER IS NOT GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO HAVE PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS, AND IS THUS A "NEUTRAL" CHOICE AS PRIME MINISTER. IN REAPPOINTING MESSMER, POMPIDOU HAS LEFT ALL HIS OPTIONS OPEN AND HAS TAKEN CONTROL OF THE TIMING OF EVENTS IN FRENCH POLITICAL LIFE. THERE IS STILL TIME BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS FOR POMPIDOU TO CHANGE HIS PRIME MINISTER AT LEAST

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ONCE MORE. OR, AS WE HAVE HEARD RECENTLY, POMPIDOU MAY DECIDE THAT HE WISHES TO BE SUCCEEDED BY MESSMER HIMSELF, IN WHICH CASE MAINTAINING HIM IN OFFICE WOULD BE LOGICAL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PARIS 5364/2

5. IT IS QUESTIONABLE HOW SUCCESSFULLY THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO PROJECT THE IMAGE OF A TIGHT, DYNAMIC TEAM. TO MANY FRENCH, AND NOT MERELY THOSE OF THE LEFT AND CENTER OPPOSITION, THE SHAKEUP APPEARS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF EXCESSIVELY AUTHORTITARIAN BEHAVIOR BY THE PRESIDENT. MOREOVER, THE FACT THAT ALL THE NEW MINISTERS SERVED IN THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT IS BOUND TO SEEM TO MANY
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FRENCH AS AN INSULT TO THEIR INTELLIGENCE. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO RECONCILE A NEED FOR CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT WITH THE MAINTENANCE IN THEIR FUNCTIONS OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND NEARLY ALL HIS CABINET. AT THE LEAST SUCH A SHAKEUP WILL APPEAR TO MANY

AS ILL-ADVISED, SINCE IT CHANGES NOTHING, AND,
THUS AS MARKING ANOTHER STEP IN THE DECLINE OF
POMPIDOU'S POLITICAL JUDGMENT.

6. MESSMER WAS INTERVIEWED BRIEFLY ON NATIONWIDE
TV, EVENING OF MARCH 1. HE PUT THE ACCENT ON THE
NEW, LEAN FORM THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN, NOTING
FOR INSTANCE THE SMALLER CABINET MEETINGS. HE
EMPHASIZED THAT IT WAS THE STYLE OF
GOVERNING THAT WOULD CHANGE, NOT THE GOVERNMENT'S
POLICIES. HE ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO ADDRESS
THE FRENCH POPULATION MORE OFTEN. HE SAID THAT
ENERGY WAS THE FIRST PROBLEM THE NEW GOVERNMENT
WOULD TACKLE, WITH AN INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE
ON THIS SUBJECT CALLED FOR MONDAY, MARCH 4. HE
APPEALED TO THE NATION FOR ITS SUPPORT FOR THE
GOVERNMENT IN THE PRESENT, DIFFICULT TIMES TO
KEEP FRANCE ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN EUROPE AND
THE WORLD.

7. AS FAR AS FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS ARE CONCERNED,
THE GOVERNMENTAL SHAKEUP SHOULD INVOLVE NO CHANGES.
THE FORMULATION AND CONDUCT OF FOREIGN POLICY WILL
REMAIN EXCLUSIVELY THE PRESERVE OF THE ELYSEE -- AND
OF JOBERT WHO STAYS ON AT THE QUAI D'ORSAY. GISCARD
D'ESTAING'S POSITION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT HAS
APPARENTLY BEEN STRENGTHENED SOMEWHAT THANKS TO
THE DEPARTURE, FOR EXAMPLE, OF CHARBONNEL AND
THE TRANSFER OF ROYER, WITH BOTH OF WHOM GISCARD
HAD DIFFICULTIES. MESSMER'S STRENGTHENED POSITION
SHOULD NOT RESULT IN CHANGES IN THE WAY IN WHICH
ECONOMIC POLICY IS MADE AND IMPLEMENTED. THE NEW
GOVERNMENT MAY FIND IT EASIER TO TAKE INITIATIVES
TO PROMOTE EXPORTS AND TO CHANGE THE RATE OF
VALUE-ADDED TAX, BUT THESE DO NOT REPRESENTED CHANGES
IN BASIC POLICY. IT IS TOO EARLY TO JUDGE ANY
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IMPACT ON FRENCH ENERGY POLICY OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S
CONCENTRATION ON THAT PROBLEM. HOWEVER, AS MESSMER
SAID, IT IS STYLE, NOT SUBSTANCE THAT IS LIKELY
TO CHANGE AND THIS SHOULD BE AS TRUE ON ENERGY
QUESTIONS AS IT IS ON OTHER MATTERS.
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